

**February 16, 2017**

***Written testimony of Helen Byron, Administrator, St. Camillus Center Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2018 and FY 2019 Proposed Budget***

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Helen Byron. I am the Administrator at St. Camillus Center in Stamford, Connecticut. St. Camillus Center is a longstanding provider of nursing care in the Stamford community. We have 124 resident beds and we employ 140 people. The American Health Care Association awarded us a Bronze Award in October of 2014. We care for people at all stages of life. We provide rehabilitation for patients returning home. We also provide long term care including palliative care, for those in need of more care and unable to return home.

I am proud to be here with my colleagues representing St. Camillus Center, and our sister facilities in Colchester, Danbury, Glastonbury, Groton, Hamden, Madison, Meriden, Naugatuck, Simsbury, Trumbull, Vernon, Wallingford, West Hartford, Windsor and Woodbridge. Together we represent 20 nursing facilities with 3,977 operating beds and approximately 3,200 employees.

I want to begin by letting you know how proud I am to be here because we want to deliver the highest quality care experience to anyone who comes to St. Camillus or any of our Centers. Our workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and so proud of them, for everything that they do. We have reduced lengths of stay and we have reduced Rehospitalizations.

But making the care great has many challenges. Making the care what everyone wants for their loved one is getting harder and harder. And the reason it's getting so hard isn't really difficult to understand---there has been almost no help in the budget NOW going on 10 YEARS. If budget passes as it is, it will be a decade of nearly flat funding for our nursing facilities. The idea that our nursing facilities could be cut this session because of our state's ongoing financial troubles is devastating.

This year the Department of Social Services began implementing a policy that will cut the property component of our rates, and these cuts will grow even more on July 1, 2017. At St. Camillus Center our state revenue will decrease. I cannot understand how we could deliver the care we want to deliver if these cuts stand. Our costs continue to go up. Last year we increased the wage and benefits for our hardworking employees. We also understand that the proposed budget will increase fines nursing homes pay by 400 percent (from \$5,000 to \$20,000). When no new resources are provided in ten years, is it really fair to increase the fines so dramatically?

We have many additional pressures beyond the important need to pay our workers a fair wage for the great jobs they are doing and doing our best to avoid fines. At St. Camillus, the needs of the residents are increasing. The acuity of the patients is much more complex than it was a few years ago. Patients are coming from the hospitals earlier, with more co-morbidities. They can not be cared for at home. They come to us weak, and in need of strengthening so they can successfully return home or not be readmitted to the hospital. OR, they need things like wound vacs, dialysis, trach care, or hospice on top of daily nursing care. These are people who can not feed themselves, toilet themselves, transfer themselves or do what you and I do for ourselves. They need us to care for them and their needs are increasing. Patients who come to us are vulnerable and in need of round the clock skilled nursing. These are the members of our community who need our assistance.

Another pressure is financial in nature. We are expected to provide care and services for patients while the costs continue to increase and reimbursement remains unchanged. All the costs around us continue to increase! Food costs, medication costs, utilities and the basics to provide care are ever increasing and we are expected to do MORE with LESS!!

Please help us deliver the high quality care we want to deliver by reversing cuts to our nursing homes.

On behalf of everyone at St. Camillus Center, thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.